

Binational Fulbright Commission – Community College Initiative

Voiceover: “The Binational Fulbright Commission in Egypt is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary in 2009, marking the successful and rich exchange of ideas, culture, and education. Named after Senator J. William Fulbright, the commission has pursued mutual understanding through mutual educational exchange since 1949.

“The Community College Initiative (CCI) was begun in May 2007. For the first time in its long history, the commission opened its doors to young Egyptian men and women who wished to develop vocational skill that would improve that would improve their employment opportunities in Egypt. Through its three-year duration, CCI is offering 1000 underprivileged young Egyptians the opportunity to earn certificates or associate degrees, while experiencing first-hand the richness of American culture.

“To target CCI’s potential stakeholders, thousands of announcement memos were sent to Egyptian ministries, three and five year technical secondary schools, two-year higher institutes, governors of different Egyptian governorates, governorates’ public relations offices, governmental hospitals, factories, business associations, privately owned businesses, franchises, medical laboratories, universities and NGOs. Opportunities were announced in seven eligible fields: agriculture, applied engineering, business administration and management, health professions, information technology, media, and tourism and hospitality management.

“Information sessions were conducted daily in the commission’s villa, and routinely in 22 of Egypt’s governorates. Advertisements were placed in the Al Ahram newspaper. An email process was created to respond to daily inquiries in requests for application forms. An exclusive website launched to facilitate access to the program and related information. Thousands of telephone inquiries were received by CCI staff members explaining the eligibility criteria for the program and application process.

“The need for the program quickly became apparent. Numbers of application forms received ranged from 2376 in its first iteration to 3845 in its second iteration. An average of 60% of application forms submitted were eligible for review, and 40% underwent the selection interview panels.

“Interview panels included prestigious specialists in the fields offered under the initiative, including Ph.D. holders and professors and various cultural exchange specialists. An average of 50% of finally selected candidates were bachelors degree holders, and the remaining 50% were graduates of secondary level technical education.

“Representation from governorates from across the country was impressive. Approximately half of the finally selected candidates were from the delta and northern Egyptian region, more than a quarter were from upper Egypt, and the remaining candidates were from the capital, Cairo. Representation of women ranged between 15% and 10% of the total number of candidates nominated in the program’s first and second iterations, respectively.

“In its first iteration, 206 candidates were nominated. In the second, nearly 400. In its third and final iteration, CCI will provide similar opportunities to approximately 150 men and women for the academic year 2010-2011.

“Implementing such an initiative requires harmonious partnerships among organizations located in both Egypt and the US. Funding, supervision and consultation on placement is provided by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. Medical examinations and visa processing is administered by the Institute of International Education (IIE) in Egypt. Intensive English language training is offered by Amideast. CCI’s website is hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, and placement in the US is made by these esteemed consortia of community colleges: Community Colleges for International Development, California Community College System, and Northwest Colleges. An advisory council of prestigious members meets periodically to provide guidance and advice on the initiative’s implementation and processing. The council is comprised of leading Egyptian and US education and private sector figures, including affiliations to the American University in Cairo, Future University, Cairo University, the Egyptian Refining Company, and the Ministry of Higher Education.

“Preparation of the candidates for their exciting educational endeavors is multifaceted. Beginning with post-nomination orientations, which walk the candidates through the eight-month preparation process they will undergo, including English language training, medical examinations, visa processing, provision of placements, pre-departure orientations and US arrival orientations.

“In the English language training provided by Amideast, candidates brush-up their English language skills and are introduced to the use of computers and the Internet, US cultural aspects and visa interview role playing. They are introduced to different teaching techniques and become exposed to different accents.

“The Institute for International Education trains candidates on completing visa application forms and medical examinations. It is worth mentioning that all these processes are parallel with their placement processes, in which our US partners determine the best academic programs and host colleges.

“As departure approaches, a pre-departure orientation exposes grantees to program regulations, different US cultural aspects, US campus life, logistics and automation, airline and air travel procedures, and conflict resolution techniques.

“In US arrival orientations CCI’s US partners welcome candidates to US by conducting a three-day orientation, where program regulations are stressed, project coordinators from each college meet with their respective candidates, and orientation on life in the US is provided. Establishing links with project coordinators at this point helps grantees to better understand the journey on which they have embarked.

“In the program’s first iteration, 21 colleges across different American regions welcomed Egyptian candidates with open arms, where 118 are studying to obtain certificates, some of which have already graduated, while the rest are studying for two-years to obtain associate degrees.

“Participating colleges are located in New England and the Middle Atlantic in the northeastern region, east-north central and west-north central of the mid-western region, South Atlantic, east-south central and west-south central of the southern region, and the Pacific-western region.

“In the second iteration, a total of 52 colleges across different US states will host approximately 400 Egyptian men and women, ten of which are exceptional deaf and hard of hearing candidates.

“First iteration students are not only on the way to completing their studies. Some have excelled academically, graduating on top of their classes, and have successfully established a link of mutual exchange with their colleagues by conducting seminars and presentations about Egypt, and information booths in their respective colleges, and by immersing themselves with their mentor families, participating in freedom, democracy and responsibility classes, winning art competitions and even attending Obama’s presidential campaigns and speeches.”

Group of students shout: “Thank you Fulbright!”